

Catch of the Day

Matthew 4:12-23

Growing up on the Texas Gulf Coast, I was introduced to seafood at an early age. I come from a family of avid fisherman, although I do not enjoy fishing myself. However, I love seafood. If it swims in the water, I'll eat it. I'd rather eat seafood than almost anything else. It doesn't have to be fried, either. It can be baked, broiled, pan fried, steamed or even poached, if done just right. I even like sushi (

One of my favorite restaurants growing up was a family style seafood restaurant, where they brought it out in bowls and platters. Scallops, crab cakes, crab, clams (both fried and steamed), oysters (both fried and steamed), both baked fish and fried fish and of course shrimp (boiled, fried, butterflied and stuffed). It was a teenager's heaven-sent meal. All you could eat of all the stuff you loved. I was in hog heaven, or maybe that should have been pig out heaven. Unfortunately, lobster was not on the menu.

One of the things about a really good seafood restaurant is they always have a "Catch of the Day." Sometimes "Catch of the Day" means that it's the freshest fish or it's a fish that's fairly rare.

But in trophy and sport fishing and even in commercial fishing the "Catch of the Day" means the biggest fish or the biggest haul of fish.

In that sense, I guess you could say that Jesus pulled in the "Catch of the Day" when he hauled in Peter, James, John and Andrew that day by the Sea of Galilee. It might not have been his biggest catch, but it certainly was the "Catch of the Day" and each of these disciples would have their own time when they too, would make a "Catch of the Day"

As we found out last week, Andrew had moved from a seeker to a pointer and introduced his brother Simon to Jesus. That must have been some special kind of encounter. Jesus must have really been struck by something in Simon's character that set him apart. Jesus even gave him a new name. Peter, the Rock.

But Peter didn't immediately jump onboard. Or maybe he did and didn't really know what that meant until Jesus came walking along the beach that day where they were fishing and said: "Follow me, and I will make you fishers of people.

They might have been the Catch of the Day but they caught something too. That day those four men and all the others who would follow later, experienced the Catch of the Day. They Caught the Dream, the Vision and Mission of Jesus.

We have dreams don't we. We may even need dreams before we can catch a vision. Because I believe that the vision develops out of the substance of the dreams. Dreams are sort of nondescript, but a vision has solidity. But you have to dream first. Walt Disney said, "If you can dream it, you can do it."

I agree, it's just that some dreams take longer to do or implement. And some dreams are dependent upon others. Israel dreamed of the coming of the Messiah. When Jesus showed up, many of them thought it was too good to be true and wouldn't accept Jesus for who He was.

But there were those who, like Peter, James, John and Andrew, knew immediately and dropped everything to follow. The dream not only lived in them, but the dream had become alive in them and began to become a Vision. What helped with that dream becoming a Vision was the Vision Jesus had.

Jesus had a vision of the world where the virtues of honesty, truthfulness, trust and care prevailed. A world where the love of and for God and love for our neighbors' rules everything we do.

That type of world, Jesus called the Kingdom of God. A realm which doesn't have any physical borders, but that lives in the heart. A realm where Christ moves us to do what is right simply because we know it's right. A realm where we love one another because we have experienced God's love for us. A realm filled with people whose purpose is to honor God with their lives. That's the Vision Jesus had, that's the Vision that captured Peter, James, John and Andrew. Their Dream had become a Vision and that Vision became their Mission.

A Mission that Jesus confirmed at His ascension, He told them "Go, into all the world making disciples of every nation, baptizing in the name of the Father and the Son and Holy Spirit." And that's what they did. That was their Mission. That's what their followers did. That's what the followers of the followers did all the way down to us. That's what we're called to do, as well. And when we have the Dream and the Vision, the Mission isn't hard at all, even in the worst of circumstances.

When the missionaries were forced to leave China in 1951, and Christians began to be oppressed by the Communist government, the future of the church looked bleak. In the preceding decades of western mission work, many of the approximately one million Protestant Christians had become "rice Christians," accepting the forms of Christianity more for personal gain than genuine conviction. When the pressures began to mount, they soon fell away. With the coming of the Cultural Revolution and the suppression of all institutional religious functions, it seemed that Christianity in China was doomed.

Yet during this period of terrible persecution, committed Christians, not afraid to defy the principalities of this world, began to meet secretly in their homes. When regular church services were outlawed during the "Great Leap Forward," these informal cottage meetings became the primary structure of the church. As their pastors were killed or imprisoned, members of the laity came forward to provide leadership. Women especially took an active role. When their houses were searched by the Red Guards, and all Bibles and Christian literature destroyed, the people drew upon their memory of Scripture and shared experiences to build up one another in the faith.

As the Christians in these small groups displayed extraordinary courage, zeal, and love, the gospel spread to their neighbors and fellow workers. Freely they gave their own food and clothing to the needy and poor, especially to those whose breadwinners had been killed or thrown into prison. They visited the bereaved and prayed for the sick, often seeing God miraculously heal.

Typical of this was the way some believers cared for a Communist school teacher who became seriously ill. So genuine was their compassion, that upon her recovery she, too, accepted Christ, only to suffer public ridicule on return to her work.

Required to appear at a public "confession" meeting, she protested: "When I was ill, you did nothing to help me. It was the Christians who did everything!" That fact shamed her critics into silence. Are we living a life that is filled with the Dream, the Vision and the Mission of Christ?

How about you? Are you ready to go fishing? Are you ready to live the life which proclaims Jesus as the Catch of the Day, better than seafood any day?